Hearing the Public's Voice:
Challenges and Opportunities in the Redevelopment of Hamptons Golf Course in Calgary

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Figure 1:Hamptons Golf Course (The Hamptons Golf Club, n.d.)

Case-in-Point 2024

1.0 Introduction

According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2023), Canada needs about 3.5 million additional housing units by 2030. Major cities with more rapid economic growth will experience a larger housing supply gap. Instead of providing more housing through greenfield development, municipal governments encourage infill development to intensify the existing neighbourhoods. To alleviate the housing crisis, the idea of converting golf courses for residential redevelopment is arising. In Ontario and British Columbia, discussions on redeveloping public golf courses are picking up steam (CBC Radio, 2019). There are also more examples of private golf courses, either under-used or closed, converted to residential development across Canada. However, golf course conversion faces lots of challenges, including polarized opinions on preserving "green open space" and providing more housing. The City of Calgary (The City) approved several golf course conversion applications. The redevelopment of the Hamptons Golf Course is a successful example of how to engage with the community and balance the public's interest in a development project.

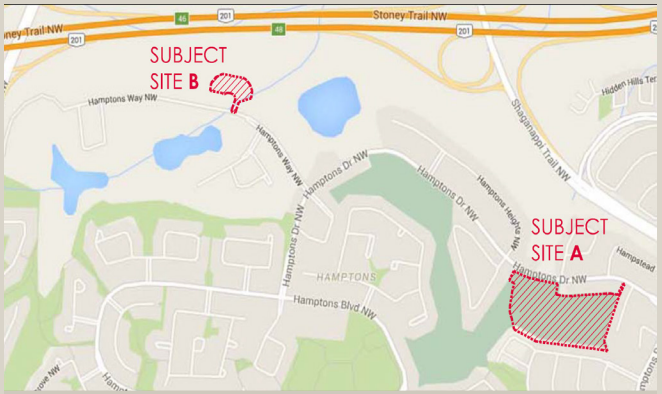

Figure 2: Locations of the redevelopment Site A and Site B (Quantum Place & Land Architecture Studio, 2016a).

2.0 Background

Alternative uses of golf courses in Canada have become a hot topic in recent years. Since the pandemic, the demand for golf declined, which caused more golf course closures in Canada. There are polarized opinions on what to do to closed or under-used golf courses. Some oppose converting golf courses to housing because of the desirable recreational and green open spaces in their neighbourhoods. Converting golf courses will worsen their quality of life. Some argue that even though golf courses are green spaces, they are not public open spaces for everyone to access. They believe there is better land use, such as for housing development.

Figure 3: Site A outline plan showing the 54 units, a public park, and landscape buffers (Quantum Place & Land Architecture Studio, 2016a).

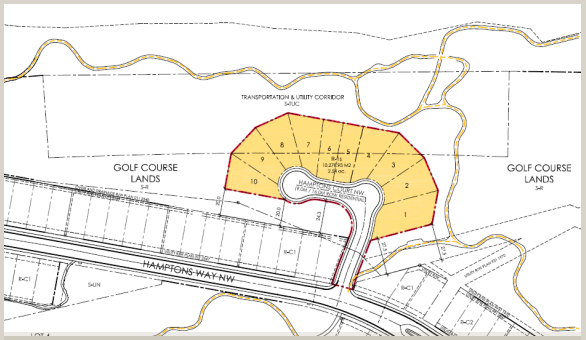

Figure 4: Site B outline plan showing the 10 units (Quantum Place & Land Architecture Studio, 2016b).

Meanwhile, many Canadian cities have a growing demand for housing. Building and maintaining infrastructure is costly, so planning best practices encourage infill residential for new developments. Golf courses close to existing neighbourhoods, were eyed for residential development to solve the housing shortage. Moreover, real estate development is another way for golf courses to maintain their financial viability—all the factors combined has driven the discussion to look into transforming golf courses into residential areas.

Hamptons Golf Course is located in a suburban neighbourhood of Northwest Calgary (see Figure 2). It is privately owned by the Hamptons Golf Club. In April 2016, QuantumPlace Developments Ltd. (the Applicant) represented the Hamptons Golf Club to submit a rezoning and subdivision application to redevelop a portion of the golf course for residential development. The application proposed to change the land use designations of two sites from open space to one dwelling and one/two dwelling districts. The proposed redevelopment targeted to provide 64 residential units, including single-detached and semi-detached housing, and a new public park (see Figure 3 and 4).

3.0 Facts of the Case

The total redevelopment area is 7.44 hectares (Quantum Place & Land Architecture Studio, 2016a, 2016b). The Applicant proposed subdividing 42 single-detached and 12 semi-detached lots in Site A (see Figure 5). In Site B, the subdivision involved ten single-detached lots (see Figure 6). Both sites are surrounded by golf course lands or other residential housing zoned as one or two dwelling districts. In addition to the residential area, the redevelopment also included a public park and public lands as landscape buffers.

Before submitting the redevelopment application in April 2016, the Applicant reached out to the community and conducted public engagement from 2015 to 2016. Two months after the applicant submitted their application, the City held online and in-person public engagement. The City acknowledged the public's concerns about this redevelopment and increased the buffer area to 80m to send details of the application to 1,029 households in the immediate surrounding area.

The City received a total of more than 2,500 letters through all channels of communication. More than 2,400 public comments opposed the redevelopment. Major concerns include (City of Calgary, 2017a):

DENSITY - the community does not have enough amenities to support the increase in population.

GREEN SPACE - the natural habitats and trees will be destroyed, and the buffer area is insufficient.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION - the road network is not able to manage additional traffic, which will cause congestion.

PROPERTY VALUE - loss in property values due to development and loss of golf course amenity.

QUALITY OF LIFE - replacing the golf course with residential development will decrease the quality of life.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT - replacing the existing pond will lead to flooding.

To address the development feasibility concerns, the Applicant carried out assessments on transportation impacts, biophysical impacts, environmental impacts, geotechnical suitability, drainage capacity and sanitary capacity. The assessments showed no major technical issues for the redevelopment.

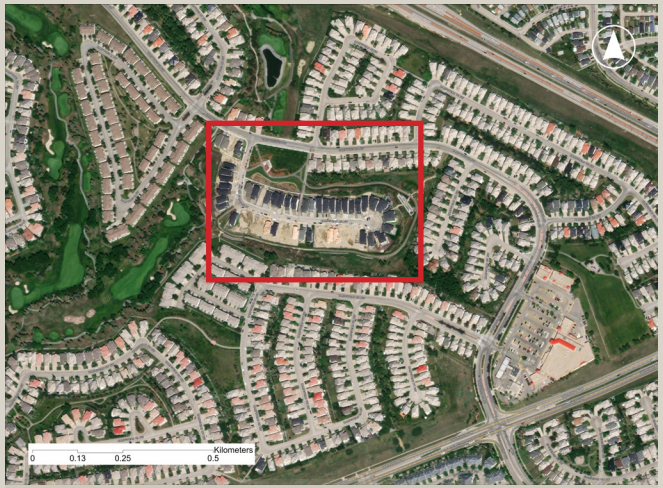

Figure 5: Satellite image of Site A taken in 2024 showing around half of the number of houses were constructed.

Figure 6: Satellite image of Site B taken in 2024 showing all houses were constructed.

Figure 7: The areas in the blue frames were changed from residential and recreational areas in the first draft to a public park in the approved outline plan (Quantum Place & Land Architecture Studio, 2016c).

"I realize that it is private property and, by law, absolutely anyone can come forward and ask for a rezoning"
- Peter Demong (Councillor of Calgary)

4.0 Outcomes

The Applicant revised the outline plan after the City reviewed the application and conducted public engagement. In the final outline plan, the number of residential units was reduced by five units to 64 units. The proposed public park area was expanded by taking up the reduced residential and landscape buffer areas (see Figure 7).

In January 2017, the City recommended the redevelopment application to the Calgary Planning Commission (CPC). The application was recommended for approval because it met the City's policies and planning principles, including creating a great community, shaping a more compact urban form, greening the city, and developed residential area. CPC agreed with the recommendation and submitted it to the City Council. The City Council held a public hearing and approved the application in April 2017. Only two councillors voted against it, and the other ten voted in favour (City of Calgary, 2017b).

5.0 Lessons Learned

The Hamptons Golf Course redevelopment is controversial. The planning and reviewing process of the redevelopment has demonstrated valuable lessons applicable to other planning practices. The key lessons are threefold: working with the public, negotiating with the developer, and discussing with councillors.

5.1 Working with the Public

Working with the public and gaining the trust of the community are the major challenges in the planning process of the Hamptons Golf Course redevelopment. NIMBYism is almost inevitable in all infill developments. For development involving the conversion of a large area of urban green spaces into residential housing, strong opposition from the public is expected. Planners are obliged to listen to the public's concerns and reduce the undesirable impacts on the residents and the neighbourhood. The Hamptons Golf Course redevelopment was successful in engaging with the public, gaining their trust, and educating them about the planning process.

The Applicant carried out pre-application engagement with the residents. Pre-application engagement provided opportunities for the Applicant to learn about the local context and build community trust. It is usually not a required procedure in the planning process but is highly recommended by the government planning authority. It allows developers to share information about the project, inform the public about the planning process, listen to the public's concerns, and address any major concerns

in the official application if possible. The pre-application engagement also built a foundation for the planners in the City to conduct public engagement. It informed planners of the major concerns of the public, which planners could focus on during public engagement.

It is not uncommon for a controversial development application to receive massive opposition in public engagement. To handle public opinions, it is the responsibility of the City's planners to summarize and review them for the City Council's consideration. In this development application, planners categorized all the public feedback into themes and provided the number of feedback received along with the recommendation to the CPC and the City Council. Even though all feedback was submitted for the consideration of CPC and the City Council, not all were considered relevant in the planning process and evaluated for the recommendation. First, the number of oppositions alone did not determine whether the application should be approved. Planners considered the uniqueness of the community and the possible impacts of the development on the community. To address the different concerns raised by the public, technical assessments were conducted to evaluate the feasibility of the development regarding stormwater management, green spaces and traffic. Concerns irrelevant to the planning process, such as the change in property value, were not taken into account in the recommendation.

Figure 8: The view of the Hamptons Golf Course and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Despite the opposition, the engagement process ensured information transparency and provided multiple channels for the public to voice their opinions. A community outreach assessment tool was adopted to consider the impact of the project on the community. Planners worked with Community Outreach Specialists to decide the programs and level of outreach needed. The success in listening to the community's concerns, addressing their needs, and

New Homes / Homes

Established community, golf course setting wins for new homes in the Hamptons

Marty Hope • for the Calgary Herald

Published Aug 25, 2019 • 4 minute read

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Figure 9: A news artcle on the completion of residential development in the redevelopment site (Hope, 2019; Molyneaux, 2019).

educating the public about the planning process reduced tensions between the government and the community. This case study also demonstrated how public opinions should be weighed in the planning process.

5.2 Negotiating with the Developers

The government is the regulatory body that ensures the development application balances the interests of different stakeholders. Maximizing profit is the primary interest of developers, while the public wants access to more recreational and open spaces. Planners are responsible for directing developments to the "optimal" place that fulfils the public's interest and does not undermine the profitability of the development.

In the Hamptons Golf Course redevelopment, the developer expanded the public park in the revised outline plan after considering the public's demand for more green and open space and the evaluation by the Park and Recreation Department. In the planning process, planners negotiated with the Applicant to maximize the public's interest while ensuring the project was profitable for the developer. The City and the Applicant also came to the consensus that the public park and the landscape buffer would be accessible by the public but owned, managed and maintained by the developer. Maintaining a good working relationship with applicants smooths the planning process. It also helps developers understand the planning goals of the government and get positive recommendations from city staff.

5.2 Discussing with Councillors

Councillors represent the residents and have the power to approve or reject applications. Planners often work closely with councillors to discuss timeliness, issues and opportunities. Planners facilitate the relationship between councillors and developers. When councillors express their concerns about the proposed development, planners share their thoughts with applicants. Applicants are also encouraged to talk directly to councillors to address the council's constituent concerns.

Although the planners in the City recommended redeveloping the Hamptons Golf Course, they did not lobby to gain support from the City Council. Instead, planners provided professional recommendations based on existing policies, best practices, and community feedback. In this case study, planners were responsible for reviewing the application, addressing councillors' concerns, and providing data to explain the recommendations.

Working closely with councillors benefits the planning process. It ensures mutual understanding and effective communication. Despite the advantage of having a good relationship, getting support from the City Council is not the planning goal of planners in the municipal government.

6.0 Final Thoughts

It is not surprising more golf courses will be converted to residential in the future. The success of some projects does not infer successful conversions in all projects. Every golf course and its surrounding neighbourhoods are unique. The Hamptons Golf Course is a privately owned and operating golf course which only a small portion of land was involved in the redevelopment. Other redevelopment projects may involve public golf courses, the entire golf course or golf courses that have been closed for several years. Given the complexity and the uniqueness of each redevelopment project, there is no universal approach to planning golf course conversions.

Planning is a process. Planners learn from past experiences and improve the process along the way. The key takeaway from the Hamptons Golf Course redevelopment is to have effective communication with the public, the applicant and councillors.

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We have a housing crisis. We don't have a golf course crisis

- Patrick Condon (Professor at UBC) & Scott Hein (Adjunct Profession at SFU)

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List of Figures